Summer 1949

OUTPOSTS

11

Poems, Articles and Reviews

KATHLEEN RAINE
JOHN HEATH-STUBBS
MAURICE CARPENTER
JOHN BATE
NORMAN NICHOLSON
WILFRED ROWLAND CHILDE
ROBERT GREACEN
ERIK DE MAUNY
HARDIMAN SCOTT
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VERNON SCANNELL

WREY GARDINER
HANNO VAN WAGENVOORDE
HUGO MANNING
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GEOFFREY PARSONS
KINGSLEY AMIS
ALEXANDER BUIST
ALAN ROOK
J. B. PICK
MURIEL SPARK
LIONEL MONTEITH
MICHAEL REDGROVE

Notices, etc.

OUTPOSTS

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EDITORIAL

WHEN asked to give a definition of poetry someone recently described it as "the least profitable way of placing words together." Certainly the poet is ill-rewarded for the effort he must make in following his vocation, and for the lifetime apprenticeship he must serve. Few poets, without the advantages of a private income, can live upon the meagre returns from their poetry, so that a situation has arisen in which poets are compelled to spend their most valuable time in other occupations in order to support themselves and their families, seizing the odd hours that remain each day to write their poems. This may be due to the normal operation of the laws of supply and demand which create a system in which film stars like Betty Grable and Frank Sinatra are provided with an income out of all proportion to their real value to society. Yet the poet will find that his problems are not to be solved by an attempt to cater for the popular taste, for—let us admit it—poetry is not popular with the general public, nor is it ever likely to be. As Mr. Henry Treece has pointed out: "There is no poetry for the People, no prose for the People, no painting for the People . . . . for the simple reason that there is no aesthetic group—the People. And those editors and leader-writers, tailors of the People's ready-made intellectual suits, who yell for a People's poetry and a People's art are at the same moment asking that the artists themselves should become infected with their own mass-produced rabies." That expresses it rather strongly, nevertheless it is a fact that the quality of work suffers whenever a deliberate attempt is made to write down to the level of those who show no interest at all in poetry.

Perhaps what is needed is a new form of patronage; one that will preserve the independence of the poet while enabling him to devote to his art all the time he wishes. The Arts Council of Great Britain might well give the matter its earnest consideration. Unfortunately, that worthy body seems to have almost excluded poetry from its programmes (it is remarkable that although there are panels for art, drama, music, ballet and opera, there is no panel for poetry).

In this issue of OUTPOSTS we have pleasure in introducing the work of Hanno Van Wagenvoorde, a young Dutch poet who writes in both Dutch and English. This is the first time that his work has been published in this country; we are sure that it will not be the last.

Acknowledgment is due to Messrs. Hamish Hamilton for the poem *Chez M. Prieur* which, since acceptance for OUTPOSTS, has appeared in Paul Dehn's volume, *The Day's Alarm*.

KATHLEEN RAINE

Psyche and the God

WHO is with me?
I whom you know.

I know no man.
I am none you have seen.

How can this be?
You are the flower on my tree,
And I the forest hidden in the flower.

I am the power
That to the dust gives sight,

I am the light
That casts the shadow of the world,
And in that shadow you are veiled
In my darkness sevenfold.

You are the child,
The bride and mother of a mystery.

Yet you shall know
Who I am that lies in you,
Whose the arms wherein you lie.

Then let the will of love
Descend upon me like a dove

And my seven veils of night
Become a sevenfold rainbow bright,

And each beam of love shall raise
A spirit that shall sing love's praise,

A heart to beat for love's delight,
The petals of an opening world,
And at the centre, love revealed.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

A Charm Against the Toothache

VENERABLE Mother Toothache
Climb down from the white battlements,
Stop twisting in your yellow fingers
The fourfold rope of nerves ;
Tomorrow I will give you a tot of whiskey
To hold in your cupped hands,
A garland of anise-flowers,
And three cloves like nails.

And tell the attendant gnomes
It is time to knock off now,
To shoulder their little pick-axes,
Their cold-chisels and drills.
And you may mount by a silver ladder
Into the sky, to grind
In the cracked polished mortar
Of the hollow moon.

By the lapse of warm waters,
And the poppies nodding like red coals,
The paths on the granite mountains,
And the forest of my dreams.

MAURICE CARPENTER

Whom She Has Chosen

(for George Barker)

WHOM she has chosen
Shall first be broken
But the Word shall drop
On his lips like bread

Whom she has taken
Shall be flayed alive
And the Word rise
Out of his writhing.

Whom she has eaten
Shall be bruised and beaten
His body scattered
Upon the water

His bread shall light at last
On the lips of crowds
Singing and shining
On their Sunday out

Whom she has chosen
Shall be Christ's cousin
And the Word grow tall
As man with the telling

JOHN BATE

London, 1949

WHAT is astir in the exhausted streets,
where summer lingers like a guest we love;
dust on the fallen apple, rumble of buses,
tamed beasts in our jungle of brick and stone.
What do the silences in between portend?
Huge Asia's shadow dims our London sight.

Couched in our unweeded gardens, slowly
in this slow season, thinking of our past,
we look beyond dry leaves that float upon the air,
out where the great race of heaven runs;
O heavy the apathetic blood,
Weighted with thoughts we know not of.

We sit in the smooth warmth, our minds unquiet,
gently against our ankles drifts the evening chill.
The sun like a faded curtain spreads across the west,
dust on the fallen apple, rumble of tamed beasts.
What is astir and why is it so still?
Deeper into the darkness delves the mind.

NORMAN NICHOLSON

Poem

I WOULD make a poem
Precise as a pair of scissors, keen,
Cold and asymmetrical, the blades
Meeting like steel lovers to define
The clean shape of the image.

I would make a poem
Organic as an orchid, red
Flowers condensed from dew, with every lobe
Fitted like a female to receive
The bee's fathering head.

I would make a poem
Solid as a stone, a thing
You can take up, turn, examine and put down;
Bred of the accident of rain and river,
Yet in its build as certain as a circle,
An axiom of itself.

WILFRED ROWLAND CHILDE

Thelema

SHINES from the heart of the sapphire chalice
The clear gold phoenix of the sun;
Down the dim pentecostal valleys
In streams and floods the roses run.

The children are playing on the highlands
Beneath red Babel's ruined tower;
Out on the unimagined islands
The Tree of Mystery breaks into flower.

The Angels have powdered the bones of the dragons,
That slew each other under the sea,
And poured the dust into purple flagons,
Filled with the strong wine of the free.

Beneath the fragrant starry blossom,
That wreathes the rich and misty woods,
The babes upon the earth's sweet bosom
Sleep on in dreaming multitudes . . . . .

ROBERT GREACEN

Ancestry

NOW let me count the silent faces of my ancestry,
What this one gave and that one took away,
What gives a casual act in certain circumstance
Their stamp and therefore mine: resemblance
Is a word too fluid and too blurred
When I compare the living heart with crumbled hand.
My sturdy forebears fled from Scottish penury;
Farmers in arms, they clashed with native Irishry
And drove them out from fertile valley, stony field,
Before subduing even hostile soil to make it yield.
They brought their bibles and their kirks, and speech
Which still is heard in Ulster lane and street,
Somewhat debased, grace-lacking, curt and clear;
They were the plunderers, God on lips in need
Whose Lowland virtues rooted them to land and seed.
They ruled three centuries, until the native Gael
Broke down the callous dykes with sudden flail,
Song on his lips, chanting of freedom and that God
To whom our Knox's creed was canting fraud.
Thus comes the cycle full; and every wrong
Has magnified itself until the common tongue
Shouts it to neutral heaven. Now my ancestry
Stands each one accused by unravelled history;
They have their righteous answers, too, but none
Can cancel out the accumulated sum
Of anger. Burdened with ancestors, tho' lightened
by a cry,
Lonely and mass-denied, I seek my own integrity,
While watching the silent faces of my ancestry
Recede, knowing what this one gave and that one took away.

ERIK DE MAUNY

Derelict

CLIMBING the mountain of the morning
On to the stark plateau of afternoon
The sunlight leans upon the window-sill:
Sick between voyages, the daylocked traveller
Longs for the colder air of wider deserts
And sees the menace on his pillow still.

A room is only terrible for its dead,
The hecatomb of dreams sprung from this head
That lolls now at the vacant edge of hell:
Blown with his grief the thistledown of hours
Knells for far countries that close up like flowers
And night has wounds no time will ever heal.

HARDIMAN SCOTT

Babel

NOTHING is unwondered, unawed, unadorned,
Nothing is impossible, no mystery
That cannot come out of the gate of night
Like a girl who's come upon the morning
Dawn-naked, naked in the light, and known;
Even the sun is cast, a sea-washed grain
Of sand, set sparkling in the hand of man.
Love has gone out of the girl, light out of the sand.

And now it will bloom this hand-held sun, a poppy
Running blood over the hands, its petals
Unfurling, falling like blood, unfurling
Till as clouds they seem, red and unrolling
Over the earth, enveloping all things,
Scorching root of corn and cornflower too,
And this, more than we imagined to do,
Has thrust up God, ruddy, raw like an aftermath.

Was this His divine mistake, or ours—we too great
To be encompassed but by confusion,
The temple on height of our terraces
Too near to heaven and too close a gate?
Or is it the mercy misunderstood,
The fruit withheld until the tree be known?
Then see, we have confused our confusion,
Twisted our tongues till even God is made ungreat.

PAUL DEHN

Chez M. Prieur

THE still rain drops; the raindrops still
Navigate my window-sill,
Where I watched them yesterday;
And still beyond the dripping eaves
By tanglewood and willow-leaves
The river bears the rain away.

From willow-tree to window-pane
Between the river and the rain
The garden's green asylum goes.
Here, the indecent toadstools sprout
And bryony that twists about
The thorny ropes of rambler rose.

Burdock, bindweed, barley-grass,
Razor-blade and broken glass
Constrict the worm that never dies.
Look! where maternal marrows sprawl,
The penitential raindrops fall
From chicory with wet blue eyes.

A flat, black boat, its bloat, fat back
Aground among the garden wrack
Lies where it has always lain,
Though yarrow-foam and sorrel-sand
Weave a slipway overland
To meet the river and the rain.

Though sorrel-sand and yarrow foam
Call the stranded exile home,
The garden whispers : " Peace! Be still."
And still the river sings beyond
The seven catfish in the pond
Who may not wander where they will.

* * *

Another time, another day
(I sit and dream the rain away)
The wind sang, the sun shone.
O visionary weather-vane,
Point the west wind home again
And let the prisoners be gone.

Let convolvulus at dawn
Creep across a ghostly lawn
In flight from the captivity.
Shift the wind, unfix the star
Till the fever swamps, that are,
Were not and will never be;

Till the boat in sunlight rides
With water slapping both its sides
On a noonday pleasure-cruise,
In the green shadow of whose wake
Voluptuary catfish take
Their dappled ease among the ooze.

Here, beyond my boyhood's eye,
Where salmon-coloured sandbanks lie,
The white birds whistle to the sea;
And fish and boat and bird are one,
Moving seaward in the sun.
O God of Gardens, set them free.

The still rain drops ; the raindrops still
Navigate my window-sill,
Where I watched them yesterday ;
And still beyond the dripping eaves
By tanglewood and willow-leaves
The river bears the rain away.

JAMES KIRKUP

Matthew Smith

YOURS, brother, is a masculine art,
the business of doing what you see.
True, you have incalculable moments, moods
of receptive calm, a mute co-operation
with the energetic rhythms of the world's
unbreaking heart: or startling in the jungle of
a human form the colour of a movement, indolently chart
interiors of sound, take snapshots of a touch,
describe the fragrant outline of the flower of time.

But you do not easily or long forget the feel
of actual things. Once the rough
excitement in your being's wild monotony conceived,
the terrible confusions suddenly awake
from a submissive blindness to one dominant clarity.
Then, with a new and humble courage, always with a pang
of doubt to compensate and deepen and redeem
the brilliant errors of your pride, you stand
erect before the great enigma, emptiness,
stretched like a sail inspired by unseen winds,
the unpredictable virgin you must violate
with delicate brute force, introducing skilfully
the brushes that a grave, capricious inward stirring lifts
and weights with tense and liquid line, magical
divisions and affinities, slow mergings, crisp definitions,
collisions of depth and shallow, light and dark;
and, if it so please the golden gods we honour,
all the freely-given wonders of the unintended.

From rich veins of subtle, vivid strength you draw
the eye's precisions to the mind's lovelier impurities.
In terrified and bold devotion to your love's
obedient and distracted joy, expressing lost
gifts a moment's anguish seeds with lucky fire—
fierce-rigged, commanding gentleness, your calculated lust
slashes the thudding canvas on its mainmast's eagle spire,
lets in the clashing gales of sun and night, and all
the lightning alchemies of realised and wrecked desire.

GILBERT PHELPS

Newts Hill

YOU were mistaken when you said
my eyes were dulled to leaves and sky,
because love-heavy head
was bowed to reach your breast.

For sky and trees proved wholly true
and breathed their kindness on my flesh,
my fingers flowed their blue,
and arms were thewed with green
and branches spread my shoulders through.

And I saw too an old cart
with sad shafts lifted up,
and forking through my heart
the cold and arid road.

Arms are those shafts, dear, bare
my arms snapped from your kindling touch,
and courage knows not where
the aimless grey road leads
under the bitter and empty air.

VERNON SCANNELL

Novelist

NOT as he was seen by the patronising eyes,
A staggering Atlas bent by a world of woe;
No longer tripped by the harelip
Nor held in check by thinning hairs,
He moves into his cinematic world,
Grows tall and handsome as any hero,

Or alternatively chooses not
To participate, instead, like God or rather
The suave conjuror,
Waves his gold-nibbed wand and the scene is set

Complete and quite appropriate : the street,
Field or room waits for its lively populace.

From shining verbal hat he pulls,
Like beautiful white rabbits, ladies;
Dark villains also and lithe girls,
And drunk with his own art extracts
The perfect word; guns, knives and razors.
At a gesture the sun stops in its tracks.

He has his worshippers and rightly they
Will never comprehend his secret power;
Beneath their birdy hats they chirp
Their formal praises : what understanding he
Possesses, what compassion; how he knows
The innermost chambers of a woman's soul.

He points the way with pointed phrase to heaven,
Flirts with angels and talks with Satan,
Eases the lovers' convolutions,
Indicates the right solutions;
Stands on a cloud and manipulates life,
Is afraid of death and cannot love his wife.

WREY GARDINER

Variable Moment

LOVE is not only in the dream
Nor stillness in the mirror.
These broken facets stir the dust
For a dull moment; light confuses time.

The peculiar faces of the sheep
Disturb the ancient curve of days
Like contrapuntal movements of
The deathless fury of the mind.

Sound in a hollow cave is time
Brought from the faithless dark of the sea,
Like dreams from impenetrable sleep,
Or water dripping on an open hand.

HANNO VAN WAGENVOORDE

Last Supper

PASS the chalice, what has been done
Shall be repeated every night.
For the blood is repeating and we drink it,
And we see face to face the vision
Of the heart that has preceded us.
There is always the heart before us,
There is always birth and transformation,
The commemorative wine is living
Like all the symbols are living.
Symbols we are, image and interpretation,
Understanding only the figurative,
Accepting only what represents,
Symbols limited by other symbols.

Memory cannot be history,
The Word comes back and we are present
At its transforming act; and taking the form
Of reality's flesh, it is *our* breath and flesh.
It is our limit and mortification,
Fertility and interpretation :
The sense of our flowering and death.

Pass the symbol, hand next to me,
Guilty as my own, you cannot desecrate
What for centuries has been touched
And tasted by saints and ignorants.
For blood is repetition and inheritance,
Regenerated principle of the only-begotten,
The only-begotten Word.

Taste and understanding; do you hear
The fearful bats and the lizards ?
The gnawing darkness round your temples?
Our banquet-hall is a moistened cellar
Where the shade of our ancestors grope on the mould,
Where the parasitic plants find their way
To our eyes and live from our light.
So lives the progeny from what we have seen,
From that which is marked on the retina :
The barren landscapes and ruins,

The charred palaces and maimed heroes,
But also the vision of the eternal wound.

Therefore fill your eye-cells with light,
The light transparent as memory,
The light cool and preserving
The images of the flesh.

Do not fear the chattering bats,
The shades and the red-faced lizards,
The gnashing spiders leaping down
From their trapeze of slimy glitter:
What is outside the circulation
Of the blood and the memory
Cannot be symbol in the mind.

HUGO MANNING

Death in Cajamarca

Atahualpa: The skull of faith whines in foothill and valley
Here by the hot springs
Here in Cajamarca

Lord
Lord
Did it have to be like this
That bullion so crudely
Should beget history?

History: Bring to the abyss
The end of a dynasty

Atahualpa: Downfall and decay
My final hour
O death of pity
Triumph of power

History: The tongue of terror and the tongue of death
Woo me
It had to be

Atahualpa: Whose the ignorance and whose the error ?
I did not see nor hear
I did not foretell nor fear
Termite within wood
Weevil among grain
The wolf devouring sheep
This sudden pain

O why did they come from a far, far land
Over a great sea on great ships
Not speaking Quichua
But spreading greed and shame
Like poison in the aqueduct
Fire in the brushwood
Why
Why
Why did they come?

History: Empires and seaboards
Fade and are nothing
Dancers and dynasties
Shriek and fall

Atahualpa: Too late I have learned
O Lord O sun
That the passion of man is as a poisoned arrow
Strikes his own heart
That he falls sadly and sure
As hopeless bird killed in blissful flight
Too late I have seen
Shadows in the quipus
O world's tumult and trumpet
Too late
Too late

History: The gates are open though the gates are tall
Others shall come and others shall fall

Atahualpa: Woe woe
Whispering in the plantain
O woe woe
Writhing in the temple
Who has prepared this banquet of horror
With wine of tears and disaster's bread ?

Disappear
Cold torment
Cold torment in the veins
Disappear
Disappear
O requiem in the head

History: Bring to the abyss
Bring to the gates
The end of a dynasty
It has to be

Atahualpa: Pure as a bride
Pure
Glitters as a bride
Pure
The peaks at the world's window
O Cordillera

Farewell

And still as a star
Still
Shines as a star
Still
O hill at the world's window
Santa Apolonia

Farewell

DEREK STANFORD

The Traveller Hears the Strange Machine

IN the house where the lights won't go on the machine
is starting.
You can hear it whirring, whining away in the dusk,
like an ancient electric fan, only somehow different;
far off but angry as a clockwork wasp.

And should you lose your way as a stranger may do,
shuffling the shadowy leaves in the lane by the back
of the padlocked garden, seeking for the station—
reached once through this dim corridor of grass,

you would hear as you passed, or paused in your steps for
a moment,
beneath the obsequious boughs of a wind-stripped ash,
the drone of spindle, belt, or fly-wheel turning
behind the blindfold walls of that voiceless house.

And there you might stand, with your feet in the
withered nettles,
till a clock from its tower in the market place
struck four
and you—not knowing its chimes for the halves or the
quarters—
might count each merging minute a full hour or more.

No sound save the purr of that hidden machine revolving;
no pencil of light from the windows, shuttered and dead;
nothing to prove that this faint unnerving music
exists anywhere in the world but inside your head.

Belated stranger, hasten while daylight lingers.
Here is no place for curious loitering:
other, like you, have stood stock-still to listen,
and lain long nights awake, remembering.

MARGARET CROSLAND

The Word is Death

THIS time the word is death
not a cross not a lily but death
This time we saw the eyes and hands
we know their look their touch their breath
This time the word is death

This time we marched alone
not with friends not with brothers but alone
This time we heard a gun a bomb
we felt the blood the soil the stone
This time we marched alone

This time they light the fire
not a lamp not candle but the fire
This time it burns our lips our nails
we cling to rust to rope to wire
This time *The Word is Death* they light the fire

GEOFFREY PARSONS

Myth Manifest

THOUGH legend whispered stories of a sun
They had been long disproved by scientists,
And when at length one day it rose and shone,
Dispersing all that customary mist
Through which long generations groped their way,
None dared at first acclaim the new event
But, blinking in the strangely dazzling day,
Still clad against the cold and damp they went.
It was the children, born into the sun,
Who bared their bodies to receive its rays,
While, white and slug-like still, the elder ones
Deplored in public such abandoned ways
But furtively viewed their naked selves in mirrors
And longed for courage to renounce their errors.

KINGSLEY AMIS

Masters

THAT horse whose rider fears to jump will fall,
Riflemen miss if orders sound unsure;
They only are secure who seem secure,
Who lose their voice, lose all.

Those whom heredity or guns have made
Masters, must show it by a common speech;
Expected words in the same tone from each
Will always be obeyed.

Likewise with stance, with gestures, and with face;
No more than mouth need move when words are said,
No more than hand to strike, or point ahead;
Like slaves, limbs learn their place.

In triumph as in mutiny unmoved,
These make their public act their private good,
Their words in lounge or court-room understood,
But themselves never loved.

The eyes that will not look, the twitching cheek,
The hands that sketch what mouth would fear to own,
These only make us known, and we are known
Only as we are weak:

By yielding mastery the will is freed,
For it is by surrender that we live,
And we are taken if we wish to give,
Are needed if we need.

ALEXANDER BUIST

Jealousy

HOW came he beside this door,
With a secret smile and strange?
There was no footstep on the stair.

He is here and everywhere,
In the half-light, in the sunlight,
Hoping for the ardent glance,
Praying for the stolen kiss.

In the unsleeping synthesis
Of his wounded, cloudy brain,
Fancy takes the place of fact.

With what rune,
Magic bough,
To expel
Hungry, futile ghost;

Sever Hyde
From suave Jekyll
Without mortal hurt?

Else it seems
He will watch us,
Haunt, possess us,
Smiling softly,
Saying nothing,
Doing nothing,
Through eternity.

GUSTAV DAVIDSON

For the Nonce

COME, let us contradict the fact
since nothing ever is exact
or proved by diagram or tract.

And notwithstanding scale and graph,
twice is often less than half;
the wheat no better than the chaff.

Truth, considered whole or part
by lens of science, probe of art,
is given only to the heart.

ALAN ROOK

Sonnet from the Sequence: *I give you Victory*

IN the green and golden light of early morning
we'll take the swallow flight, the sky way
of thrushes and the bee's discerning
hustle to honey, and all the vigorous day

shall run like sap into our pulse returning
the fond and careless light o' love of May
bright on our fame and faces. We relearning
the spear path and the fishes' secrecy.

O it is power and lust to be naming
the maypole season—linnet's litany.
Proud? So was Adam when he saw Gabriel coming,
we are as mighty and as proud as they.
Let spring come. Let the year keep turning
outward, us-ward to the insurge of the sea.

SAM HARRISON

Room

THIS room is very old and very wise—
we can do nothing to surprise her now
for, being well acquainted with the dead,
she knows the living intimately, takes
their every mood for granted and accepts
each moment's joy or sorrow as it comes.

See how, chameleon-like, she imitates
the sombre colour of our present thoughts,
so alien and so difficult to grasp,
and how she makes the sunlight on her walls
appear remote and cold, as though she were
the dwelling-place of fear since time began.

THE POET AS CYNIC

A discussion of Robert Graves's poetry

J. B. Pick

MY TITLE is an adaptation of Francis Scarfe's "The Poet as Critic." Robert Graves doesn't fit absolutely into the category of "cynic" —no-one fits absolutely into any category—but there is no doubt that both his reason and his unreason give the impression of scepticism. Extreme rationalism and extreme irrationalism both lead to scepticism: Robert Graves manages to arrive there by a process which might be called reasoned irrationalism. He had a phase of "poetic unreason" and of a psychological approach to poetry. The former was a wry romanticism involving nursery rhyme, earthy and fantastic myth, satirical fantasy. The second paved the way for Auden. This attitude Graves later renounced, but needlessly. It is still a definite constituent of his poetry. The cynicism which caused it—the fruit of the first World War—remains. This cynicism is of a rarefied, emotional type; it is not the detached, curious, scientific cynicism evident in, for example, the work of Richard Hughes. While Hughes gives the impression of a man who *knows*, Graves is a man who still fights. His later poetry is a distillation of poetic unreason.

Lately he has turned to prose, which is significant. Prose is the natural medium for the mind broad enough to be cynical without hardening cynicism to a nihilistic dogma. The novelist is generally a more mature mind than the poet, dealing with the aspects of immediacy rather than with the manifestations of eternity in time. He contemplates reality rather than the underlying "Reality," though conscious of the Reality's existence. He is more of a pragmatist.

Whether Graves is an anarchist or a nihilist I'm not quite certain—even though he would reject both terms. The anarchist is an acceptor of life. But, paradoxically, the nihilist is not negative. He is the acceptor of death. Robert Graves still protests.

He has a liking for the outrageous knocking at the doors of habit:

> " Those famous men of old, the Ogres—
> They had long beards and stinking arm-pits;
> They were wide-mouthed, long-yarded and great-bellied,
> Yet of no greater stature, sirs, than you."

He the attacks sheepishness, effeteness, regimentation, intellectualism of civilised man. He will stir up and provoke. As a corollary

to this Graves admires the poet who is also a man or even, theoretically, a poetic beast. He has no love for the actual beast, and Nature to him is sometimes merely a vile caricature of man.

Graves is a *rebellious* fatalist. No rebellious fatalist can be happy. Graves's work gives no suggestion of happiness. I doubt if a man's work ever lies about his personality—if it does, then I may well be wrong about Robert Graves, knowing only his work. His unhappiness led him into many researches, to discover *why* and to unearth the rock, the solid material rock upon which his poetry could dance and never die. His work and his scholarship are essentially honest. The latter has provided the material for much prose, but I would guess it to have been undertaken rather for the sake of poetry.

He has the bravery of the nihilist, yet remains a lyricist despite the fact that he sees no escape—"No escape; no such thing," and "No gate is fast, no door is fast." His cynicism has led him to an abandonment of pure lyricism and an adaptation of it to the philosophical semi-lyrical short poem, the technique of which has had a great influence on later poets. He is one of the greatest masters of technique in modern poetry. He was one of the first to use consistently assonance and the fall-away rhyme which gives such an air of disillusion to any poem :—

> " O Love be fed with apples while you may,
> And feel the sun and go in royal array,
> A smiling innocent on the heavenly causeway.
>
> Though in what listening horror for the cry
> That soars in outer darkness dismally,
> The dumb blind beast, the paranoiac fury."

His unrhymed legendary philosophic poems set a fashion. He has of course, had a great influence on Norman Cameron, a sound poet in his own right, and upon Alan Hodge, but the method has influenced many more than these. Half-rhymes were a commonplace with Graves before Auden made them unavoidable :

> " Walk between dark and dark—a shining space
> With grave's narrowness, though not its peace."

This trick he uses with invariable exactitude for its purpose. It is one with his attitude to life—or as much of this attitude as is evident

in his poetry. He is definite rather than positive, rarely neutral, fighting against those forces which destroy man.

He attacks the negativeness of this age, yet he himself has very little which is positive or constructive to offer. Perhaps this is a measure of his true understanding, since this age, as an age, has nothing to offer. It is an age swept by the current of history rather than one in which men mould history. It is a measure also of his failure to reach that rock basis for which he has been searching since he as an individual has no solution to offer. There are two lines in one of his latest poems which are positive enough :

> " Then reckon by what you are or do,
> Not by the epochs of the war they spread."

He insists, cynically, upon the interchangeableness of everything, and, to prove his point, here is an example of the interchangeableness of one of his verses with the method of Auden. Auden has benefited from the study of Graves. This is an early poem :

> " The broken spray left hanging
> Can hold his dead leaf longer
> Into your glum November
> Than this twig tossed shivering
> By your East wind anger."

There is a northern quality in Graves's work, reminiscent of the music of Sibelius, the verse of the later Yeats or Higgins, the poetic theory of Synge, the thought of Tolstoy or Kierkegaard, the feel of rock, grey tones, purple heather, hardy shrubs, twisted roots. The cynic as poet might be expected to give a sense of dissatisfaction to the reader ; yet the northern landscape, though often cold, is never unsatisfying to a man who feels its certain life and understands its tints and harsh loveliness. Even dissatisfaction may be valuable in a smug and regimented age, whose arteries are hardening and whose head freezing, who is being swept, unknowing, into the abyss. Graves, perhaps, leaves the new blossoming to others. One man is unlikely to achieve both cynicism and synthesis in poetry.

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THE POET IN MR. ELIOT'S IDEAL STATE

MURIEL SPARK

FROM a proper concern that the word "culture" is becoming ever more loosely used, Mr. Eliot was led to write the series of important essays that make up *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. The popular usage of the word has come to imply that culture is something which anyone who has the aptitude, can acquire through study or derive from environment. In this country, the term is often used to express a rarified quality emanating from the universities or from old English country houses. Mr. Eliot shows that culture is, in fact, something self-cultivated over the whole of history. It is the development of every activity of the human race, rising from the roots of religion, yet not dominated by religion; it is akin to, yet not necessarily recognisable as, a religious plant.

Hence, all human affairs and attitudes—manners, trades, learning, philosophy, the arts, Derby Day, Cowes—are aspects of culture which, Mr. Eliot writes, "may even be described as that which makes life worth living," and the evolution of a culture can be traced from its religious basis through the culture of the individual, of the group, and of society as a whole.

These speculations lead the author to outline a sort of Ideal State which to many minds, and especially to the young mind, may not be acceptable. Nevertheless, if one must disagree with Mr. Eliot at all, it must be on fundamental principles (for his reasoning is faultless); and since this article is not a political one but is limited to the particular view of the poet, I am accepting Mr. Eliot's fundamental principles along with the Ideal State, which, although it may not be a desirable one, is the inevitable conclusion to his arguments.

In considering firstly the position of the individual poet, I would like to assume the presentation of a State such as Mr. Eliot describes on a kind of puppet stage. The poet finds himself in a society governed by an elite comprising the ablest people in every trade and profession, each member of the elite occupying a position to which he is suited. Since some levels of culture are more highly honoured than others, a class system would naturally have arisen which would have threatened the functioning of the elite system in future generations, had not Mr. Eliot placed, side by side with the elites, a system of social classes, each of whose function it is to foster and transmit to posterity the particular culture of its own class, the upper classes, being less in number, to have the greatest power. So that the poet

lives in a State governed on the one hand by experts and on the other by an aristocracy.

The poet is himself a member of an elite contributing to the poetic necessities of his fellow men. His needs are the material ones of food, warmth, etc., and the spiritual ones of occasional solitude or love or hate. He also needs books and papers. All of which depend upon his economic freedom. Now, if power in any social class means wealth, the aristocracy is the group best equipped to provide the economic necessities of the poet—who had better corner his patron quickly, if the latter has not already slipped off-stage to the South of France.

I am not sure that a system of patronage is a bad thing, although today we have come to dislike the idea. While patronage in art has shown some excellent results in past centuries, the poet today has become used to independent speaking and there is no doubt that patronage is always attended by some degree of moral influence. Possibly Mr. Eliot's theory allows for a greater economic power to be placed in the hands of the elites than I have been able to gather from his pages, for he cannot have overlooked this inference.

The poet may ask why the elites may not themselves foster and transmit the culture of society. Mr. Eliot's answer is, " The primary channel for the transmission of culture is the family . . . " and ". . no man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree, of culture which he acquired from his early environment." The poet of the Ideal State may retort by quoting from elsewhere in Mr. Eliot's manifesto ". . . it is the instinct of every living thing to persist in its own being." And at this point the poet will have to try to discover how much or how little he is in the hands of his inheritance and early environment, or to what extent he is compelled to persist in his own being, before he can agree that the culture of a society is better transmitted through a system of classes whose main function it is to foster themselves.

(There is always the possibility, of course, that these thoughts might lead the poet to that state of conflict with society which sometimes provides the conditions in which poetry can flourish.)

The chapter dealing with the Region presents a valuable doctrine to any modern society in which the poet can spiritually breathe. It stands on its own considerable merit, within or without the boundaries of the Ideal State. This doctrine must be acceptable particularly to the poet and to all who feel oppressed by present trends towards uniformity in all things. The author is careful to distinguish between local Nationalism and Regionalism. Political and economic problems he says, should not be "the *primary* concern of the true regionalists.

The *absolute* value is that each area should have its characteristic culture which should also harmonise with, and enrich, the cultures of the neighbouring areas." Mr. Eliot is not for the administration of artificial respiration to an exhausted language, from which some regional poetry has suffered a considerable amount of torture in recent years. But it does not underestimate the life-giving transfusions of authentic local languages into the language of the whole society. Languages die out, but whatever is valuable in them will and should survive. He makes the significant point that a people "which has lost its language may preserve enough of the structure, idiom, intonation and rhythm, of its original tongue (vocabulary is of minor importance) for its speech and writing to have qualities not elsewhere found in the language of its adoption."

One of Mr. Eliot's arguments against a society governed only by elites is that "the only common bond" between individuals "will be their professional interest, with no social cohesion, with no social continuity . . . . they will meet like committees." It may be felt here that Mr. Eliot has stretched a point : people with very different social backgrounds are constantly meeting in social gatherings simply *because* they have common interests. Perhaps poets and writers are exceptional in this, but it is true that they will always congregate in pubs and in each others' homes for the sole purpose of being with each other, not having the slightest interest in, or information about, the others' social status. And they do not meet like committees.

Nevertheless, Mr. Eliot's argument is valid in that he shows the need for the intelligent individual to exchange ideas with others who are occupied outside his own sphere of activity. "In our time", he writes," we read too many new books, or are oppressed by the thought of the new books we are neglecting to read ; we read many books, because we cannot know enough people ; " and " In a society of a smaller size there might be more conversation and fewer books."

One is always compelled to marvel at the lucidity and ease of Mr. Eliot's prose, and his meticulous reasoning. The volume as a whole is an impressive work, contributing towards the clarification of many meanings, besides that of culture and all it embraces. Mr. Eliot has taken his stand by some strongly controversial principles, but whoever challenges these principles, however violently, must concede the intellectual richness on almost every page. Each essay, complete in itself, yet gives directly to the main theme ; and there are many other fascinating theses which appear almost casually, and which, had the author been so unwary, must have led him far astray.

I should not like to think that the view to which I have restricted this article, and the consequent elimination of considerations beyond those of the poet, have served to undervalue the volume.

REVIEWS

A Crown for Cain : Emanuel Litvinoff (Falcon Press, 7s. 6d.).

The Traveller has Regrets : G. S. Fraser (Harvill Press and Editions Poetry London, 8s. 6d.).

The Wounded Prince : Douglas Le Pan (Chatto & Windus, 6s. od.).

Time and the Wind : Sydney Tremayne (Collins, 6s. od.).

CHARY though we may be of attaching poetic labels, there are times when the work of a poet pronounces itself so strongly in a particular accent that some dogmatic classification is unavoidable. This is so of Mr. Litvinoff's poetry—for quite undeniably (and I am sure he would be the last to deny it) it is *Jewish.* "Note, when the word 'history' is spoken, how his dark eyes reveal the sudden sensitive wound and the ineffable melancholy" wrote a young Jewish poet of his fellows recently, and throughout *A Crown for Cain* we feel never far from this "sensitive wound." Cain's crown can be no other than a crown of thorns—*The Thorn of Conscience* and *The Thorn of Exile* Mr. Litvinoff has headed the two sections of his book and, whatever his ideas about the "redemption" of Cain, his poems seldom fathom deeper than—or reach beyond—the bitter turmoil of a people scattered to the four wild winds of ocean, and torn by loneliness and guilt. So much so that

> " Often, believe us, it would be sweet to die,
> not to feel this intolerable pain of history"

Curious it is that these poems should have been written by a young man in the Allied forces—curious because his exile is not the exile of the soldier, but the exile of a lost people, and the blood on his hands is not the blood of Europe, but the blood of Abel—the blood of history. Strange, because for him time is not the irredeemable year but, like Winter, " an aspect of spirit," and he says in his *Poem for an Heretical Avenger* " O in the loneliness of your heart . . . . the Word is growing to release us."

The Untried Soldier, although a first volume, established Mr. Litvinoff as a poet of unusual and original technical ability, but although his latest book maintains a high standard, it should be said that he too often drops into a syntax that confuses where it might illuminate. He says, for example, "through my veins/wounds bleed my brother's death"—which means, I think, "because my brother and I are of the same blood, his death takes its toll of me also " ; but whether or not this is so, he should have found a concise and comprehensible way of saying it. In a number of poems his imagery is inconsistent ; in one

he says "the pearl secreting womb/and the dark oyster/locked in the cave of her sea"—giving the oyster the same analogy to the womb in the second image as had the pearl to the womb in the first. But elsewhere he shows a fine craftsmanship, using not only the more subtle half and assonantal rhymes, but also the full rhyme with excellent effect. Mr. Litvinoff is a poet whose future work must be awaited with respect, and though he may be in search of a land beyond exile, his is certainly not merely a voice crying in the wilderness.

Whatever may be said about the Apocalypse—and Henry Treece, its leader, has lately said harsher things about it than most other critics might have ventured to say—it was a bright comet while it lasted. And so we may ask, with its near echoes sounding in our ears, what has become of its other leader, G. S. Fraser, whose poetry Treece has said was "dull" and Spender has said was " in the tradition . . . of a young man's letters to his circle of witty and graceful friends."

Probably neither Treece nor Spender were quite serious, and if they were they might have added that as a translator Mr. Fraser may well be unequalled in his field, and as a poet his achievement is considerable enough to hold him high in the ranks of the current "younger generation."

Having seen a few—a very few, it must be admitted—of Mr. Fraser's latest poems, I am inclined to believe that *The Traveller has Regrets* distinguishes a period in his writing when the pen was poised uncertainly like a compass pointer awaiting the decision of its pole. A period when, having lost the old momentum, he had yet to gain the new. The fact that the translations in this book are more lively, emotionally and imaginatively, than the author's own poems seems to support this view. A rather professorish, academic, and distinctly literary manner has always been a characteristic of his work—but so, too, has the precise use of language, the skilled manipulation of word and rhythm which is too often lacking in the modern poet. It is easy, in our post-war wisdom, to smile rather condescendingly at a collection of poems written mostly in the mid-nineteen forties—but one has to admit that most of these poems (wide though their range) really reflect the shallowness of their rootless times. Listen to the bar conversation in Cairo :

> " Pleasant to meet indeed, old man ;
> No one to talk to all these nights
> About the promptors behind the sets."

But not all the poems are of that period, and those that are not usually present Mr. Fraser in a better poetic light—though *Winter*

Landscape (certainly one of the best) is an exception. Perhaps the compass pointer has once more found its direction. I hope so, for when it does I know that we shall have some more first-class poems in the accent of a strong and individual voice.

Far too much has been made of the fact that Mr. Le Pan is a Canadian. Even so distinguished a critic as Mr. Day Lewis sees in his work a possibly unparalleled combination (poetically) of the "New and the Old World." Yet, as a poet, Mr. Le Pan is clearly a European. Not only his thoughts and themes, but his technique and approach—even to the imagery related to his own country—are completely influenced and conditioned by what might be called the modern English attitude to poetry. In *The Wounded Prince* one finds none of the virility, none of the brusqueness of rhythm, none of the extraverted argument—nor even crudity of form—which is so much a part of contemporary Canadian poetry.

In fairness to Mr. Le Pan one must say that his book is of a far higher and more consistent standard than most first volumes. But he has little new to offer, and suffers somewhat from the indulgence of Mr. Day Lewis's introduction—an indulgence which leads us to believe that these poems may (as he tells us they did with him) "enlarge our viewpoint on living."

Good critics are not always good poets. But it is noticeable that when a critic (or someone who had has experience in editing) produces his first volume of poetry, it has not those beginner's weaknesses which so often mark a poet's book-début. It is usually quite competent. And so, with *Time and the Wind*, Mr. Tremayne has done what we might have expected of him. He has produced a book of poems which are pleasant enough in their way, and to which, I am sure, no one could take any strong exception. But there is the rub. One takes no exception—and finds no particular adventure, only the occasional neat rhythm or the prettily rounded phrase, such as:

> " The lazy lanes of Wistow,
> They wander without care
> And lead with many a twist, oh
> From nowhere to anywhere."

Mr. Tremayne has a limited vocabulary, and though this assists him to achieve simplicity, it brings also, that monotony which one might associate with Basic English. It is true that he has entitled his book *Time and the Wind*, but that seems to me an inadequate reason for

including those two nouns quite frequently in the considerable majority of his poems. The characteristics of his work are an even rhythm, a carefully planned half-rhyming and rhyming scheme, an imagery which has many original turns (but little fire) and a steady balance between rather traditional forms and modern themes. He is at his best writing of landscapes, seascapes, the seasons, and those pleasant and uncomplex things in life which do not demand too much profound thought. When he attempts to be profound (as in *The Living Years*, which opens rather like a Professor Haldane version of Genesis, written in a manner slightly reminiscent of *East Coker*) he fails utterly. His Time incantations prove to be mumbo-jumbo, and Time emerges with no significance added since we last closed our Eliot or our J. W. Dunne. But, like Mr. Le Pan, Mr. Tremayne has made a far better first showing than many a poet who has ultimately reached levels of high achievement, and his second book may yet prove *Time and the Wind* to have been the fruitful matrix for a new poet.

LIONEL MONTEITH.

On Seeming to Presume: Lawrence Durrell (Faber, 8s. 6d.)

WITH a poet whose development has seemed to move in the direction of genius, we are apt to find ourselves strangely ungrateful on reading his third volume of verse which glitters, intermittently, with the tinsel and foil of a first-class talent.

Such seems to be the case with Lawrence Durrell; but before enquiring further into the affair it behoves me to give two "snap" definitions of my arbitrary terms: genius and talent. The first, then, I take to be that species of mind whose expression in literature results in a brilliant and compulsory employment of language; while by the second, I imply, that quality of mind whose verbal expression strikes us as brilliant but voluntary. To put it in a more colloquial manner: talent does just what it can, but genius does what it must. The former is free activity; the latter activity under orders.

There is, it seems to me, a deal too much of this virtuosity-to-choice here present. The pose is that of the gifted dilettante, and the products have sometimes a water-colour slightness. "Windless plane trees above Rodini," writes the poet, "To the pencil or the eye are tempters." A wager of skill, though, is not enough. Phenomena must do more than tempt; they must infatuate, seduce, and command the poet.

That there is no inherent slightness in Mr. Durrell's mind we know full well; and the poem from which this book takes its title bears evidence of how darkly and deeply the burden of man's destiny weighs upon him. He shows, however, a tendency to make clever conversation out of his despair, to exploit its prismatic possibilities, to juggle with its aspects, display its radiations. This, no doubt, is an easier task, than to essay an investigation of its personally-manifest essence; but only by holding to the latter course can the poet hope to write a memorable poem. At the present time he is like some Mercutio failing to respond to Hamlet's situation.

Poetry, maintained John Milton, should be "simple, sensuous, and passionate." Re-educated by Mr. Eliot and the lesson of the "metaphysicals," we might perhaps rewrite that formula as "sensuous, passionate, and complex." Now Mr. Durrell is generally sensuous, often clever, but seldom passionate. (Note, here, that "the clever" and "the complex" are not synonymous qualities). It is true that a few of his poems often magnificently fuse all three desiderata; but one or two triumphs per volume rather falls short of our expectation concerning so potentially a worth-while poet.

DEREK STANFORD.

Collected Poems: Lilian Bowes Lyon (Jonathan Cape, 8s. 6d.)
Collected Poems: John Gawsworth (Sidgwick & Jackson, 10s. 6d.)
The Pattern of a Dark: John Sundowne (Phoenix Press, 6s.).
The Listening Tree: Herbert Bluen (Fortune Press, 5s. 0d.)

THE assembled work of an authentic poet invites to discovery of or renewed sojourning in "countries of the mind," to quote Mr. Middleton Murry. And in the *Collected Poems* of Miss Lilian Bowes Lyon, to which Mr. C. Day Lewis contributes an Introduction, a terrain is charted wherein newcomers will roam pleasurably and to which those to whom it is familiar will need no persuasion to return.

The salient qualities of these poems are spontaneity, shapeliness, delicate sureness of touch. Their nature imagery is cool and aerial like competently handled water-colour, and they are pervaded by a compassion for beset humanity finding typical utterance in:

"I think of the innumerable slow lives whose history
differs a hairsbreadth from the hedgerow story:
thorns in black competition, the roped glory
of gossamer, soon gone,
with berries dipped in blood."

Later achievement is foreshadowed to a marked degree in the earlier work, but comparison of

"I have rebuked the split seas of my nature,
The dividing thunders, trouble and shiver
Of tides moon-entangled . . ."

from 1934 with this from 1946 will indicate the poet's advance both in vision and technique:

"Snow, my Fall of Mercy, I have troubles to confess.
I should be shouting up to God the kind of field I am,
A naked acre for the wolf, a grave-yard for the lamb.
Oh think before you cover all beneath a fathom of peace."

(*The Field to the Snow*)

In its middle period, Miss Bowes Lyon's poetry shows traces of a since discarded penchant for the idiom of Hopkins and reflects also, in tautness of emotion and technique, the preoccupation of the 1930's with the technical reconstruction imposed by Eliot and with experiment in the political uses of verse. Nevertheless, two of the best poems, *The Hedgerow Story* and *Duchess*, belong to this time.

The latest work, *Evening in Stepney* and *A Rough Walk Home*, shows Miss Bowes Lyon's power at its present height though not yet, one might predict, at its zenith.

Like Miss Bowes Lyon's, *The Collected Poems* of John Gawsworth chart a personal landscape, but in quite different cartography. She writes "from within outwards," he is subjective. Her mood and vision are compassionate, detached, philosophic; with him emotion is at once more lively and more intimate. His preponderant form is the love lyric, and outside it—sometimes within it—he inclines to astringency and, on occasion, to cynicism. He tends to use distorted phrasing, with less justification or success than a painter like

Matisse would use distortion of form, and one experiences here and there the jarring impact of an awkward word :

" . . . . . the axle and hub
Whereon my life would trundle round, instead
Of in the city's commerced hub-a-drub."

There are affinities with the earlier Yeats and, as in *World's End*, a fine sombreness recalling A. E. Housman :

" Satanic horns are blowing
The view halloo of doom
And summoned Man is going
To dig his little room "

but, modern without being " modernist," Mr. Gawsworth does not readily submit to pigeon-holing in this or that school—a minor point since, if one may paraphrase *Hamlet*, " the poetry's the thing." If a label must be found for him, " neo-Georgian" suggests itself; but to call him a lyric poet of fine calibre, with the virtues of clarity and compact statement well developed, would be a fair assessment.

The trouble with *The Pattern of a Dark* is a heart-fixation. There are forty-six poems and hearts feature in all but nine of them. In all, there are 154 hearts, giving an average of 3.35 hearts per poem, which, to take part of a line from *Poem XXVI*, makes "heavy weather of the heart." None the less, Mr. John Sundowne does adumbrate a personal map :

" So if there is dark and no lantern
We must make of the dark a pattern,
A chart ; "

and, its cardiac obsession aside, the book contains careful and sometimes penetrating thought clothed in competent free verse that more than once rises into fine poetry.

The trail ends with *The Listening Tree*; for Mr. Herbert Bluen, so far from charting any recognisable land, is all at sea with an assortment of undistinguished imagery enclosing nothing very remarkable in the way of thought. His major faults are shallow vision and, on the score of technique, trite imagery plus defective rhythm and lack of regard for vowel values. If he can surmount these, and signs are not altogether lacking that he can, his next book will deserve a better welcome. But he would do well to forget the "prose-poem" : *The Listening Tree* contains eight specimens, which is eight too many.

MICHAEL REDGROVE

Modern Poetry and the Tradition: Cleanth Brooks (Poetry London, 1s. 6d.)

SEVERAL years ago, in an essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Mr. T. S. Eliot wrote: "The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art towards the whole are readjusted; and, this is conformity between the old and the new."

There can be no doubt that modern poetry has involved a critical revolution of major importance. The old equilibrium has been destroyed and a new one established. In order to obtain a true perspective, argues Mr. Cleanth Brooks in his *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, a collection of related essays, it is necessary to revise the whole conception of the history of English poetry. The theory is, of course, a familiar one, but in outlining his own adaptation of it Mr. Brooks throws some interesting sidelights upon the use of metaphor and metaphysical conceits, and draws a number of parallels between poetry of earlier periods and that of to-day. His critical analysis of the work of the American poets, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren, is particularly illuminating and will certainly be of value to those English readers who have been unable to follow American developments closely. The volume also contains two remarkable essays on "The Waste Land" and Yeats—"The Poet as Mythmaker"—in which Mr. Brooks displays the characteristic qualities that have made him one of the leading critics in the United States.

It should be emphasised, however, that any assessment of English poetry in the light of modern knowledge can be successful only if it is attempted on a strictly impartial basis. Mr. Cleanth Brooks, like other critics of the Eliot-Richards school, tends to react strongly against the Romantic Movement and is unable to separate his prejudice from his judgments, so that the work of poets like Shelley and Wordsworth seems to be somewhat under-rated.

MORTIMER STEELE